

(Employees have said they would like to have more opportunities to have input to the administrator. So last fall, Administrator Judi Johansen said she would look for ways they could. She said she wants to get feedback from employees and just hear what's on their minds.)

In mid-December, BPA set up a new e-mail box, "Talk to Judi." Johansen has committed to read every piece of mail that comes in. Employees who want to remain anonymous can send comments in a blue envelope to "Talk to Judi-7."

In the first month of her new listening post, Johansen said she heard from about 30 people a week. The Circuit asked her about the comments she has received to date and her thoughts. Here's what she had to say.)

**T**hank you everyone who has sent an e-mail or blue envelope message to me through the "Talk to Judi" mail box. I'm learning a lot, and that is the purpose of the mailbox. The messages I've gotten have been heartfelt and informative.

People have been very forthright in telling me what I'm doing wrong and what they think ails BPA. But they have been equally forthright in proposing solutions and saying what I and other managers are doing right. I must admit that the "atta girl" messages feel very good and remind me of the importance of appreciation in the workplace.

It won't surprise any of you to learn that the majority of the comments, especially at first, have been about the retention allowances and VSI/VERA. Steve Hickok and I had a very "interactive" meeting with Transmission Business Line managers about aspects of the two programs and how they do or don't work together. My mail contains many comments about the programs as a whole and a fair number about what employees see as unfairnesses in the ways the programs work.

The worst part of making big policy decisions is not being able to see the effect they will have on individuals. I'm finding out about many of those effects now because many of you are willing to

go out on a limb and tell me. I wish I could leap in and fix each example of inequality, but it doesn't take a lawyer to know that I'd create more trouble than I'd resolve. I'm going to work through my managers to make needed policy changes.

The executive group will be looking at how the retention allowances and VSI/VERA programs work together and individually. I think we all understand how people feel when some people in a work group are on retention and some aren't. One person who wrote to me suggested that entire job classifications or work groups should be covered by the retention allowance if the classification or group is likely to be raided by outside companies. Another person suggested that all the retention allowance money be put in a pot and all employees who save BPA money or improve the workplace should share it. We'll have to look at these and other ideas.

What concerns me the most is that a number of employees don't seem to feel valued unless they receive a retention allowance or VSI/VERA. That is certainly not what we had in mind when we decided to use those tools.

The best way to resolve the retention allowance issue may be, as several of you pointed out, through training and employee development. If we have a sufficiently well trained workforce, we can handle it when some of our employees are recruited away. Somehow we have to do it in a way that keeps us from being used as a training ground by other utilities, but we can do that.

I don't know if the VSI/VERA issue is going to

be a bigger deal or a smaller deal in the future. I do know that we will be using VSI/VERA less and the use will be more targeted. I've had several people write to me that they are very angry that they are in positions not covered by the VSI/VERA because they think they have been great employees and deserve the money and they are upset that employees in less-in-demand positions are getting what they see as rewards.

To me, the VSI/VERA program has never been about rewards or whether a person is a good employee who deserves to leave with some money. It has been a way to avoid a RIF. Some job classifications are too critical to encourage people to leave them and the people in them should have pride in that. I don't see it as punishment that you are in a critical position and aren't being encouraged to leave BPA. I see it as a further recognition of the valuable work you do.

Not all my mail was about retention and VSI/VERA. Among the letters were ones that urged me to read a particular book an employee found insightful; that challenged the adequacy of the security around the child care center; or that called my attention to a memo about underrepresentation of Hispanics in government, which I take as a challenge to our new recruiting program and our employee development practices.

Another asked why the *Federal Employees News Digest* lists BPA's VERA authority as indefinite when we've been saying it expires in September. On the last point, the answer is that we have to ask for and receive approval from the Office of Personnel Management each year we want to use VERA. VERA authority belongs to OPM so we don't count on it before we get it. VSI authority, however, is BPA's, assigned to us directly by law. That law expires at the end of this year, and we are not sure we can get Congress to extend it.

Again, thanks for letting me know how these programs affect you individually and how you think programs affect the agency as a whole. It's important that I know so I can challenge my thinking and the thinking of BPA's other managers and supervisors. ◀

## Employees talk to Judi



Employees packed the auditorium at the Ross Complex in December for the "shirt sleeves" session with Judi Johansen. The administrator asked employees around the region what would make BPA a great place to work. In mid December, BPA opened the "Talk to Judi" e-mail box.

Photo by Jack Odgaard

## Circuit

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## A Dreamer's Dream

by Bob Andrews

I was awakened very early  
And couldn't go back to sleep.  
The dream I had was vivid now  
With memories I wanted to keep.

About a world of people  
Who loved and cared. So much  
It spread throughout the universe  
And every Soul was touched.

This dream is quite a task for me  
And at times it's hard to do,  
It's a wonderful dream that I'm sharing  
About me just loving you.

Loving, Living, and Giving to life  
Is all I have to do -  
To make this dream for our world  
A lovers' dream come true.

Now reality is upon me  
And I can't go back to sleep  
To dream a dream about our love  
'Cause hate just runs too deep.

I must go out into the world  
Until every heart is touched  
Because this love I have inside  
I need to share so much.

(Editor's note: Bob Andrews is the catering manager for Powerhouse Foodservice that provides the food services at BPA's Ross Complex in Vancouver. He also writes poetry and recited this poem at the Feb. 1 kickoff of Black History Month observance at headquarters. Watch for events around BPA to celebrate African American heritage during February. (c) Bob Andrews, used by permission.)